

Regional Human Service Levy

King County, WA

Overview

SUBJECT: Development of an ordinance to guide investment of funds from the new Regional Human Services Levy for veterans and others in need.

SUMMARY: Under the direction of the chair and vice chair of the Law, Justice and Human Services Committee, staff have begun development of an ordinance to provide guidance regarding investment of the proceeds of the newly authorized King County Regional Human Services Levy for veterans and others in need. This levy, passed in the November 2005 general election, will provide \$13.3 million per year for 6 years. 50% of the proceeds are dedicated to improving health, human services and housing for veterans, military personnel and their families, and 50% is dedicated to improving health, human services and housing for a wider array of people in need.

IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND: The levy proposal was originally developed by the RPC as a veterans services levy for a total of \$10 million per year. This was based on an allocation plan developed by a subcommittee of the RPC that proposed \$2 million for expansion of existing county Veterans Program services, \$6 million for housing and related services and \$2 million for other human services for veterans and their families.

As the proposed levy moved through the Council process from the RPC to the Budget and Fiscal Management Committee and to final action in the full Council, human services advocates raised concerns about the exclusive focus on veterans services and expressed their desire for a larger, comprehensive human services levy proposal. At the full Council a compromise was reached. The levy proposition was changed to increase the overall annual amount to \$13.3 million and to provide half of the funds for veterans services and half for human services not limited to veterans.

The amended proposal was placed on the ballot and approved by the voters with majority of 57.92% and widespread support throughout the cities and sub-regions of the county. When the measure passed, the Council realized there was a need to provide additional direction regarding the investment of these funds in order to assure they achieve the kind of results that will satisfy the taxpayers of the county that they have made a wise investment. There are literally hundreds of millions of dollars of unmet health and human services needs in King County. If these funds are spread too broadly across the wide array of needs, little or no impact will be seen. They need to be focused in one or two areas and invested strategically not just to add new services but to improve the overall capacity and results of existing services and systems. In the 2006 Budget Ordinance, the Council, therefore, placed the levy funds in reserve and indicated it would complete an ordinance providing direction for the investment of these funds during the first quarter of the year.

PROPOSED FOCUS FOR USE OF LEVY FUNDS

Background: Original Proposed Focus -- The original veterans proposal and allocation plan had a focus that was based upon the county's mandated responsibility to provide services for the most disadvantaged and disabled veterans – the veterans who have lost their connections and have spiraled down (or are on their way down) into homelessness and repeated emergencies involving costly and ineffective public safety and emergency services intervention. These veterans may be

eligible for federal and state veterans benefits and services (if they were honorably discharged) but are unable to get to these services on their own, and the services and benefits alone are not enough.

As part of reviewing the broader issue of how to shore up and improve the regional human services safety net, the RPC reviewed the county Veterans Program and realized that it had evolved the kind of services that are needed to help people most at risk to avoid or reduce homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system. These services include such things as assessment and treatment, housing, employment and jail re-entry services as well as the traditional emergency financial assistance. In dialogue with the county Veterans Board and staff, it also became clear the board and staff were anxious to get ahead of the curve with so many military now returning from new combat situations. They were limited, however, by the small amount of dedicated funding available and the rules that limit the kinds of veterans that can be served.

The RPC saw the urgency of improving services for veterans now and believed the public would as well. The committee also realized that investing in services and housing to prevent and reduce homelessness for veterans could provide a significant contribution to the community goals of ending homelessness and preventing emergencies requiring expensive criminal justice and emergency medical interventions. A significant portion of the people who recycle through the jails, courts, ER's and shelters are veterans.

Proposed Levy Investment Ordinance Focus

Primary Focus: Consistent with the initial proposal for veterans only, it is proposed that the new levy funds be used primarily **to prevent and reduce homelessness and unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice and emergency medical systems for veterans, military personnel and their families and other individuals and families most at risk.** The intent here is to maximize the positive impact on the well-being of the individuals and families in need (veteran and non-veteran) and the quality of life of the community generally while also helping to control after-the-fact health and safety cost growth that is limiting the ability to invest in more preventive and constructive areas.

Limited Additional Investment: It is also proposed that a small portion of the non-veteran funds be targeted to continue **to identify and promote development of effective earlier intervention and prevention services.** This limited investment is intended to recognize that while we must do better for those who are already in serious trouble and can no longer manage on their own, we also need to keep working on how to help reduce those risk factors that lead to the worst case outcomes.

In addition, the county would commit to continue working on regional strategies for improvement in other areas of focus in human services, building on the previous work of the RPC and Executive human services task forces and connecting with regional issue focused groups such as the SOAR project for children and youth.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF A PROPOSED LEVY IMPLEMENTATION ORDINANCE

Development and Approval of a Strategic Investment Plan -- In order to produce significant results and have real impact, it is important not only to have an overall focus for investments but

also, within that focus, to invest strategically to achieve specific results and to maximize those results by partnering with and leveraging existing resources. The proposed levy investment ordinance will, therefore, require the Executive to develop a strategic investment plan by late summer for Council review and approval prior to consideration of the 2007 budget.

Investment Plan Content and Process – Specifically, the proposed ordinance will require the Executive to:

- Complete a review of current services and resources, system improvement plans and best practices related to the focus areas for levy funds;
- Based on the review, identify, evaluate and propose a set of strategic investment to increase access to and desired results of service for people most at risk by maximizing opportunities to partner with and leverage existing services, housing and other resources.
- Design service investments to help assure access to services according to need regardless of where one lives in the county;
- Propose specific allocations and implementation plans for each proposed strategic investment;
- Propose an allocation plan for the 6 year levy period in accord with the parameters listed below; and
- Propose an evaluation program for the 6 year levy period to be implemented in conjunction with the two citizen boards called for to oversee and report respectively on the expenditure of the veterans and non-veterans portions of the funds.

The ordinance will also give further guidance about who should be involved in developing the plan, calling for the Departments of Community & Human Services and Public Health to develop the plan collaboratively and to look for opportunities to collaborate on initiatives with relevant planning groups such as the Committee to End Homelessness, the various implementation groups for the Adult and Juvenile Justice Operational Master Plans, the King County Children and Family Commission, SOAR, a regional planning group for children and youth and family services, and sub-regional human services planning groups.

The King County Veterans Program Board will act as the official county advisory board in the development of the investment plan for the veterans' half of the funding. All proposals for investment of these funds will be reviewed by the Board with their recommendations provided as part of the plan.

Allocation Plan Parameters – The following kinds of parameters will guide development of 6 year allocation plan and the availability of funds for specific investment proposals.

Overall Parameters –

- Because it will take most of this year to complete the investment planning and implantation process, the bulk of the first year's levy proceeds for both veterans services and general human services will be used for one-time expenditures for such things as housing acquisition, facility development, training, protocol development, information systems and equipment associated with the proposed service improvement investments.
- In addition to the initial one-time expenditure fund, up to \$1 million per year beginning in the second year may be allocated for capital housing or facility expenditures.
- Administrative expenditures will be capped for both the veterans and non-veterans funds. Proposed investments in the evaluation plan and in one-time program

development work may be paid for from the one-time fund established with the initial levy proceeds above and beyond the administrative cap.

- The questions of supplanting of county General Fund revenues and backfilling state and federal reductions may also be addressed.

Veterans Fund Allocations – Beginning in year two:

- At least \$2 million per year is invested to improve the services of the King County Veterans Program, including expanding services to veterans and military personnel and their families not eligible under previous funding sources.
- The remainder of the levy proceeds dedicated to veterans (about \$4.67 million per year) is invested to improve housing and service options for veterans and military personnel and their families in need and may be used in partnership with other funds for projects that jointly benefit veterans et al and people with no military experience.
- All together, half of the annual proceeds (\$6.67 million) will be expended on services and facilities that demonstrably improve services for veterans and military personnel and their families.

General Human Services Allocations -- Beginning in year two:

- At least \$ 5.17 million per year is invested in health, housing and human services designed to prevent and reduce homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice and emergency medical systems.
- Up to \$1.5 million per year is invested in early intervention and prevention services that have proven effective and beneficial in reducing risk and problems in the long term.

Service Improvement Best Practices -- The levy investment ordinance will also include a listing of priority areas to consider in developing the investment plan. These are based on best practices and promising directions identified in adopted plans to reduce homelessness and unnecessary involvement in the justice system, as well as the planning of our Veterans Program Board. These priority areas include investments that:

- Improve access and successful engagement for veterans and non-veterans by creating seamless, user-friendly pathways from local institutions, the courts, sub-regional safety-net services and street outreach into coordinated and integrated services.
- Reduce recycling and increase stability and self-sufficiency by developing and expanding the capacity of a network of supportive housing options that use housing first strategies and provide integrated support, treatment and employment services.
- Increase access to and quality of post traumatic stress syndrome treatment for veterans and others in need.
- Help assure that veterans and their families in need benefit from increased access to services that more effectively meet their needs in both veterans service systems and generic human services systems and help develop new partnerships between veterans and generic systems.
- Allow for the timely and appropriate sharing of client information necessary to achieving maximum results with all of the access and service and housing improvement investments.
- Increase the impact of programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing recidivism in the criminal justice system by adding a housing component and/or increasing capacity.
- Increase self sufficiency by adding employment goals and services to existing programs.

- Reduce the risk of future criminal behavior and/or dependency problems by promoting healthy child development for children most at risk